

Message Text

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SUBJ: THAI MILITARY VIEW OF PROSPECTS FOR CAMBODIA

REF: BANGKOK 5663

SUMMARY: REFTEL REPORTS COMMENTS ON THAI FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN ON POSSIBLE CEASE-FIRE IN CAMBODIA. THIS TELEGRAM REPORTS CONTRASTING COMMENTS BY CHIEF OF STAFF SUPREME COMMAND GENERAL KRIANGSAK CHAMANAN ON SAME AND RELATED SUBJECTS. END SUMMARY

1. DURING LUNCHEON WITH ACTING DCM APRIL 4, SUPREME COMMAND CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL KRIANGSAK CHAMANAN MADE A FORECAST ON CAMBODIA. HE BAGAN BY SAYING THAT HE DID NOT SHARE THE WELL-KNOWN PREFERENCE OF FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN FOR THE EMERGENCE OF SIHANOUK AS THE HEAD OF A NEW GOVERNMENT, NOR DID HE SHARE THE VIEW THAT THIS WAS PROBABLE. KRIANGSAK CLAIMED TO HAVE INFORMATION THAT KHIEU SAMPHAN AND IENG SARY WILL NOT ACCEPT SIHANOUK. ACCORDING TO THIS INFORMATION, REPRESENTATIVES OF KHIEU AND IENG WILL BE MEETING IN PARIS AT END OF THIS WEEK OR DURING NEXT WEEK TO MAKE FINAL DECISION. KRIANGSAK BELIEVES THAT DECISION WILL CONFORM PRESENT POSITION AND REJECT SIHANOUK.

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2. KRIANGSAK FORESAW EMERGENCE OF A KHIEU-IENG

RUN GOVERNMENT WITH A ROLE FOR LONG BORET, ALTHOUGH NOT AT THE VERY TOP. HE SAID THAT KHIEU, IENG AND LONG WERE ALL ABOUT THE SAME AGE AND HAD KNOWN EACH OTHER FOR YEARS. HE FELT THAT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO WORK OUT A SATISFACTORY SOLUTION. HE WAS CONVINCED THAT THE KC WOULD ALREADY HAVE SEIZED THE CAPITAL IF THEY HAD WANTED TO DO SO. THEY HAD NOT DONE SO, HE ADDED, BECAUSE THEY HAD NO WAY TO FEED THE REFUGEES IN THE CITY.

3. KRIANGSAK EXPRESSED THE VERY STRONG PERSONAL VIEW THAT SUCH A SOLUTION WOULD BE PREFERABLE TO A SIHANOUK GOVERNMENT. BOTH KHIEU AND IENG WOULD ACT FROM PRIMARILY NATIONALIST MOTIVES. THEY WOULD NOT WISH TO FALL TOTALLY UNDER HANOI'S SWAY. KHIEU ALSO HAD MORE CLOUT WITH PEKING THAN DID SIHANOUK. THE PRC HAD MADE SPECIAL PLANES AVAILABLE TO FLY HIM TO INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS, WHICH THEY HAD NEVER DONE FOR SIHANOUK. SIHANOUK WAS MUCH TOO ARRATIC AND, IN ANY EVENT, WOULD LACK REAL POWER EVEN IF NOMINALLY HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE KHIEU-IENG-LONG ARRANGEMENT WAS BETTER FROM THAILAND'S POINT OF VIEW, KRIANGSAK SAID.

4. KRIANGSAK NOTED THAT LONG BORET WOULD BE PASSING THROUGH BANGKOK ON APRIL 6 AND WOULD RETURN TO PHNOM PENH APRIL 7. KRIANGSAK WAS NOT SCHEDULED TO SEE HIM, BUT STRONGLY WISHED TO DO SO AND WAS EVEN CONSIDERING FOLLOWING HIM TO PHNOM PENH IN ORDER TO TALK WITH HIM. HE IMPLIED, BUT DID NOT EXPLICITLY SAY, THAT SUCH A MEETING WITH LONG BORET WOULD BE AIMED AT PROMOTING THE KIND OF SOLUTION KRIANGSAK PREFERENCES, HE RECOGNIZED THAT HIS VIEWS WERE CONTRADICTORY TO THOSE OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION, KRIANGSAK ASSERTED THAT COMMANDER OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY, GENERAL KRIT SIWARA, HELD VIEWS IDENTICAL WITH HIS OWN.

5. AS TO THAILAND'S RELATIONS WITH A COMMUNIST-DOMINATED INDOCHINA, WHICH HE FORESEES, KRIANGSAK
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STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG THAI MILITARY FORCES. AGAIN DISAGREEING WITH CHATCHAI'S IDEAS, KRIANGSAK SAID HE WAS NOT CONVINCED THAT THAILAND WOULD OPEN FORMAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH PEKING IN THE NEAR FUTURE, NOR THAT STRONG MOVES TO WARM UP RELATIONS WITH HANOI WOULD BE MADE. HE SEEMED TO BE THINKING IN TERMS OF A THAILAND MILITARILY STRONG ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND PRESSURES FROM COMMUNIST

NEIGHBORS WITHOUT MAKING MAJOR POLITICAL OR OTHER CONCESSIONS. HE FELT THE KING, THE BUDDHIST RELIGION AND BASIC THAI INSTITUTIONS PROVIDED A SUFFICIENTLY STRONG RALLYING POINT TO HOLD THE COUNTRY TOGETHER, PROVIDED THE THAI ARMED FORCES WERE GIVEN SUFFICIENT WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT.

6. IT WAS IN THIS CONTEXT THAT HE SAW A ROLE FOR THE US. HE COMMENTED ON THE IRRELEVANCY OF US COMBAT AIR UNITS HERE TO CURRENT THAI PROBLEMS AND JOKINGLY SUGGESTED THAT IT WOULD BE MORE USEFUL IF A US DIVISION WERE MOVED FROM KOREA TO THAILAND INSTEAD. BUT HE MADE THE VERY SERIOUS POINT THAT US ASSISTANCE IN MATERIEL WAS NEEDED IF HIS SCRIPT WAS TO WORK OUT.

7. COMMENT: KRIANGSAK HAS NEVER MADE ANY SECRET OF THIS CONTEMPT FOR SIHANOUK, AND HE AND OTHERS IN SUPREME COMMAND HAVE ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS IN THE RECENT PAST NOTED THAT THERE WERE OTHERS ON THE ANTI-GKR SIDE IN CAMBODIA WHO WOULD BE MUCH MORE VALID INTERLOCUTORS. THAT KRIANGSAK WILL, IN FACT, GO TO THE POINT OF ACTIVELY SEEKING TO SUBVERT THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS STRIKES US AS UNLIKELY, BUT CANNOT BE ENTIRELY RULED OUT.

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